



U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement

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News Release

ICE removes the first group of families utilizing Expedited Removal authority

SAN ANTONIO — As part of the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Secure Border Initiative, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) today announced that the first group of 10 family units was deported to Honduras via government aircraft. The flight departed the morning of Thursday, May 25 from the San Antonio International Airport, arriving in Honduras that afternoon.

A total of 120 people boarded the flight, including 21 individuals who were part of family units. ICE worked closely with the Honduran Consul and other Honduran government officials to organize the return, obtain travel documents and country clearance. Under new DHS policy, family units are now subject to Expedited Removal, a process that provides DHS with the authority to expeditiously return applicable illegal aliens to their country of origin as soon as circumstances will allow. As a direct result of this new policy this first group of families spent a total of 10 days at the facility.

"We are working expeditiously to repatriate these families back to their country. By expanding expedited removal to illegal alien families, we are sending a message to the smugglers that they no longer can exploit these families," said Marc J. Moore, ICE field office director "We hope this program serves as a deterrent to human smuggling."

On May 15, DHS opened the T Don. Hutto residential facility, a 500-bed facility in Williamson County, Texas, that is specially equipped to meet family needs. Prior to the opening of this facility, families caught at the border were often released with "Notices to Appear." This created a border vulnerability in which smugglers would place children in harm's way by bringing them across the border along with groups of smuggled strangers to try to pass the groups off as family units. The goal was to avoid detention altogether, although in some cases where "families" were detained, the individuals, including children, were detained separately.

Today, those families who are detained at the border are kept together as a family unit until their removal from the United States. DHS anticipates that ICE could remove approximately 1,000 individuals per month through the Williamson County facility.

Today's deportations were executed under the Secure Border Initiative (SBI), a comprehensive multi-year plan by the Department of Homeland Security to secure America's borders and reduce illegal migration. Under SBI, Homeland Security seeks to gain operational control of both the northern and southern borders, while re-engineering the detention and removal system to ensure that illegal aliens are removed from the country quickly and efficiently. The goal is to eliminate the practice of "catch and release" at the Southern border and replace it with a practice of "catch and return."

Expedited Removal streamlines the processing and removal of non-Mexican illegal aliens. This policy permits aliens caught within 100 miles of the border who have spent less than 14 days in the U.S. to be removed without an immigration hearing. These efforts under the Secure Border Initiative have allowed ICE and CBP to reduce the total percentage of non-Mexican illegal aliens released into society by more than a third. The average length of stay in ICE detention before removal for aliens under Expedited Removal is approximately 21 days, down significantly from the average of 90 days spent in ICE detention in the traditional removal process. These statistics reflect a dramatically improved removal efficiency, which has allowed ICE to free up more bed space to detain and process even more aliens.

Expedited Removal disrupts the various human smuggling cycles that occur along the border by substantially reducing the time from arrest to ultimate removal from the United States and foreclosing opportunities for these illegal aliens to reconnect with their smugglers and guides. Since last September, DHS has successfully implemented Expedited Removal between the ports-of-entry at all nine U.S. Customs and Border Protection Border Patrol Sectors on the Southwest border. In January 2006, DHS expanded Expedited Removal to the entire U.S.-Canadian border and all U.S. coastal areas.

ICE

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of four integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.